

Family Values: Extended Family

by Mapu

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Summary: Lucas meets a nice old couple ... the hard way.

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Family Values Series

> Extended Family<h1>

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My seaQuest stories are set in the first series since IMHO that was the best series. I don't own the seaQuest crew - someone else does ... I just play with them. The Family Values Series are stories that have a strong focus on Lucas.

Gratefully, Lucas climbed the few steps on to the small aircraft. Usually he didn't like to travel in anything smaller than a super-liner. There was something reassuring about having all that metal surrounding himself, that Lucas found comforting. Logically he realized that it would make little difference what type of plane he was in, should the worst happen, but his dislike wasn't logical ... it was purely emotional. This time however, he was so looking forward to being in the air and on his way home to the seaQuest at the Alaskan port where it was docked, that he didn't care about the size of his transport.

The conference he had just attended had been long and difficult. His presentation had been challenged and questioned deeply. Lucas had been forced to address areas of his research that he hadn't been prepared to discuss. One older scientist, in particular, had asked the most difficult questions, forcing Lucas to scramble for answers to satisfy the man. He had begun to suspect the other man had a personal grudge against him. In the end, he'd been forced to admit to the entire group that he didn't have all the answers, and that his research had a long way left to go.

The strangest thing was that after the presentation had finished, several of the attendees had made a point to congratulate him on his work. Most surprisingly, his primary antagonist had been the most vocal of the group. Lucas had been confused then and still was a day later. He couldn't wait to get back to the seaQuest to talk to Bridger about it, maybe the Captain would be able to explain it to him.

Lucas smiled briefly at the other two passengers as he passed them and settled himself into one of the rear seats. Both of the other passengers were wearing expensive business suits, and Lucas felt a little out of place in his jeans and denim jacket. He put the discomfort out of his mind, deciding he'd much rather be wearing jeans than a suit any day. He watched the copilot appear from the cockpit and depress the lever to retract the boarding steps. The steps collapsed against each other as the powerful little hydraulic motors raised the door. Without realizing he had done it, Lucas imagined how the door's system could have been designed.

"Relax gentlemen, we'll be in the air shortly. Please check that your seat belts are securely fastened. Our flight time will be a little under 3 hours. Unfortunately we are expecting the flight to get a little bumpy as we draw near our destination," the copilot informed his passengers in a professionally friendly voice, before returning to the cockpit. Moments later Lucas was in the air, heading home.

Almost 2000Km to the Northwest, 72 year old David Morris finished stacking the last of the winter's supply of fire wood on to the large pile he had built near the entrance of his mountain home. He sat, for a moment on the edge of the pile, breathing heavily and trying to catch his breath. His wife Eleanor, or Elly as she was known, came out from the unassuming cabin, bringing with her a small thermos.

"Some coffee for you, my love," she said, handing over the flask to her husband of more than 40 years.

David took it gratefully in his heavily calloused hands. Elly had always loved her husband's hands, they were strong and rough but capable of such amazing gentleness. She could remember, even when he had been a young man, his hands had carried the signs of hard constant work. Now that he was old his hands told the story of his life, etched deeply into every crease and wrinkle. It was a story full of many joys and sorrows and dominated by constant effort. His hands told the story of a man who never gave up.

"What do you think?" David asked, indicating the clouded sky with his free hand, distracting her from her thoughts.

Elly stood motionless for a long minute, her eyes on the sky and the roiling clouds there. "I think it is a very good thing we are ready for winter. It looks like it's here with a vengeance," she said at last.

"How long do you think?" David asked her. Over the years, he had developed a healthy respect for Elly's ability to second guess the weather of the mountains. In all the years they had lived here, she

had been uncannily accurate in her guesses of a storm's ferocity and duration.

"We've got maybe an hour, two at the most and it's going to last," she said with confidence.

"Well, we had better enjoy the view while we can," David said, patting the log beside him.

With a small smile, Elly sat at his side. In silence, their hands intertwined, they stared out at the beautiful wooded valley their home overlooked. Each savoring the view, and trying to record a picture of it in their memories, for the long snowed-in weeks ahead with no view at all.

Lucas gripped the arm rests of his chair harder as the small jet was buffeted by another hard burst of turbulence. At the beginning of the flight he had tried to take his mind off the turbulence by compiling his conference notes on his computer. In the end he'd had to give up. The plane had been moving too randomly for him to be able to type coherently. Soon after that he had also given up all pretense that he wasn't afraid. He had grabbed hold of the armrests and hadn't let go since. In the seats in front of him, both businessmen were seated calmly, watching the flight from their respective windows. Lucas had no desire to see the storm brewing just beyond the plexi-glass of his window, and had shut the window blind.

A flash of brilliant white illuminated the entire cabin, putting everything into a stark contrast for a split second. A high-pitched whine filled the cabin, followed by a small muffled bang and sudden sharp pitch to the left.

"Oh Shit!" the businessman on the left swore, staring shell-shocked from his window, as the plane began to lose altitude.

Lucas was also seated on the left, and couldn't resist opening the blind for a look. After he had, he wished he had left the blind closed. Flames engulfed the wing where once a small jet engine had been mounted. Although he was no expert, Lucas could tell the wing had been badly damaged.

The copilot's tense voice interrupted over the internal com. "Gentlemen, secure your belts, we are going down." In the background, Lucas could hear another voice, presumably the Captain, declaring an emergency and reporting their coordinates. Lucas pulled convulsively at the strap of his belt, tightening it hard enough to cut the circulation to his legs. He squeezed shut his eyes, as the plane dipped steeply downward.

Lucas said a silent good-bye to the Captain and his friends on the seaQuest. He had a few regrets, the worst being the knowledge of how badly his death was about to affect the Captain. He and the Captain had become very close over the last several months, and it hurt Lucas to know he was going to cause the older man pain. For what seemed like an eternity, the plane dropped before suddenly lurching upward as it hit something below. Lucas let out a short yelp of fright. Then the plane hit the ground again, this time much harder. Lucas's face smashed into the back of the seat in front of him and he blacked out.

David and Elly rose from their comfortable perch as the light snow began to thicken, obscuring much of the view. Both had silently decided it was time to go inside the cabin and begin the long wait for the storm to end.

"Do you hear that?" David asked, hearing a high pitched whine which grew increasingly louder.

"Oh My Lord!" Elly exclaimed, pointing at the small aircraft which was dropping rapidly from the clouds.

The plane wobbled uncertainly from side to side as it dropped, trailing a thick column of dark smoke. David and Elly watched in horror as the plane dropped down into the valley they had been enjoying just moments before. The nose of the plane lifted, as the pilots regained some control of their craft in the final seconds, before it hit the ground. After the first impact, the plane seemed to bounce before coming to a sudden rest among the trees. Within minutes, both Elly and David had their survival packs on their backs and were on their way down the slope, toward the crash site. Both knew there was almost no time for a rescue before the storm hit them, but it was inconceivable not to try.

Lucas woke, an acrid smoke filling his nose. Everything around him was tinted in red. He wiped at his eyes and discovered he'd been looking through a film of blood. He tried to undo his seat belt, and was surprised to find his right arm wouldn't obey his commands. Looking at it, he could tell it had been broken ... it was twisted at an unnatural angle. He thought it strange, but although he expected it, he felt no pain at all. Fumbling with the buckle, he managed at last, to release it using his left hand. He staggered to his feet and moved forward on the slightly sloped deck of the cabin. He had intended to try to help the two men he could see still seated and unmoving at the front of the plane but stumbled and fell.

He found himself on the snow covered ground outside, having fallen through the wide rip in the airplane's side. Getting to his feet, he staggered away from the plane for several meters, before remembering the men still inside. He realized sadly there was no way he was going to be able to help them. He knew he'd never be able to climb back up into the plane and he was just too tired. Below a nearby tree he saw a huge pile of snow-dusted pine needles. It looked so comfortable and warm he couldn't resist. He stumbled over to it and dropped thankfully down on top of the pile. He leaned his back against the tree and closed his eyes. He was so cold and so tired. There was nothing he could do about the cold, but he knew a short nap would take care of the tiredness. Then, when he was rested, he could go find some help for the others. With that thought in mind, he allowed himself to drift off to sleep.

David and Elly moved quickly through the the gathering storm, and it wasn't long before the plane came into view. It was obvious, to both of them, that anyone in the cockpit was dead. The plane had smashed, nose first, into a very solid outcropping of rock. The entire front of the aircraft had been compacted. The remaining body of the craft had been bent around a tree, and it was missing both wings. David and Elly rounded the plane to where the fuselage was torn open. David hoisted himself up into the plane's passenger cabin. A few moments later he returned to Elly at the opening.

"Two men, both dead," He told his wife tersely.

Elly nodded sadly, neither of them had really expected survivors after seeing the wreckage. David jumped heavily down from the plane. His feet sending out a small shower of snow, from where they hit. Elly gasped at what she had seen in the spray. Quickly dropping to her knees, she carefully dusted away the top most layer of snow, to reveal a cluster of bright red crystals.

"Frozen blood," she muttered.

David examined the ground around them carefully. "Tracks, they go this way." He said, leading Elly away from the plane, and toward the trees. Not far from the wreck, David spotted a figure, sitting propped against a tree, rushing over to it they found a young teenager. Snow covered the boy's body, and his skin, under the frozen blood covering his face, was blue. Expecting the worst David knelt next to him and felt the boy's neck for a pulse. He was relieved to feel the slow, but steady beat, under his finger tips. "He's still alive ... barely" he told Elly.

With practiced speed, they had the boy wrapped in the thermal blanket from Elly's pack, and David lifted him in his arms. The trip back up the slope to their cabin was difficult, made harder by the increasing winds and snow fall. It took both of them, working together, to lift the limp boy up the steepest sections of the rise. Finally, with the full fury of the storm whipping around them, they reached the top and found their way back to the cabin. Elly unlatched the door, which opened with a thud, as the wind snatched it from her hand and slammed it back against its mount. After David had struggled through the entrance, she closed the door again, needing to put her full weight against it to close it.

David quickly place the injured boy down, onto the stuffed cushions of their old couch, and began stripping off his snow soaked clothes, while Elly went to rebuild the fire. She quickly had a blaze going, the warm flames throwing a cheery orange light through the room, and dispelling the power of the storm raging outside. Elly helped David wrap the boy in the old fur coat they usually kept in the lock box. The coat was made of real fur, very illegal, but also very warm. David had trapped and tanned the hides long ago, before the act had become illegal, and neither had seen any sense in destroying the coat simply because the law had changed. Both reasoned the animals that had been killed for the coat were not going to be saved by its destruction. Both believed it would be far more criminal for them to waste the sacrifice the animals had made. Besides, the coat was very warm.

Working together, David and Elly, shifted the heavy couch and its precious burden closer to the fire, where the warmth could do the most good.

"You'd better call Earl at the ranger's station and tell him what's happened," David told Elly.

He seated himself on the edge of the couch and checked their unexpected visitor for injuries. It was obvious the kid had hit his head and had a broken arm, but after what he'd seen of the other passengers in the plane, David wasn't willing to believe those were the only injuries. He was pleased, when he discovered, that exposure

to the fierce cold was indeed the boy's only other injury.

Elly went to the medium sized vid system, sitting by itself, in the corner of the main room. Even though it wasn't by any means new, its modernism looked decidedly out of place among the other rustic furnishings. If they hadn't needed it for emergencies, like this one, neither David or Elly would have tolerated it at all. The screen glowed with a harsh cold light when Elly turned on the unit.

The pleasant face of a young female news reader appeared on the screen. The young woman smiled confidently, to her unseen audience, as she reported the days events. Elly typed in the number to the ranger station on the little keyboard at the base of the unit, and pressed the send key. She waited impatiently for the news reader's face to be replaced by Earl's far less appealing features. Instead, a red and black banner super imposed itself over part of the young woman's face. "Transmission Error," blinked unhelpfully across it. Elly tried the number again, to no avail. She tried the numbers of several different people, each one resulting in the same depressing message.

She was about to turn the set off when the news reader's comments caught her attention. "Coming up next, an update on the search for the downed UEO plane." Elly called to David and together they grimly waited, through the various glaring commercials, until the news report continued.

"Search efforts are in full swing this afternoon, for the 3 passengers and 2 crew of a UEO transport flight, which has been reported crashed in the Mt Mothma area." The news reporter announced with an almost unseemly amount of excitement in her voice. Elly and David exchanged an alarmed look, MT Mothma was almost 50 Km to the southwest, on the other side of the range. The rescuers were looking in the wrong place. They returned their attention to the screen and the still speaking young woman. "On board the aircraft are the UEO's Chief Financial Advisor, Mr. Pollack and the Deputy CEO of CoreComm. Both men were on their way to the merger negotiations with Xmark. Also on board, a young UEO scientist, Lucas Wolenczak, son of the famous Dr Lawrence Wolenczak. Mr. Wolenczak was returning to his duties on the UEO flagship seaQuest. Several members of the seaQuest crew, including its Captain, have just joined the search effort."

While she had been talking, the vision had cut from the young woman's face to what was obviously the search coordination site. Several people, in UEO uniform, were moving swiftly and with purpose around the site. These, David presumed, were the seaQuest crew. Elly moved to turn off the set, since the newsreporter had moved on to another more news worthy story.

"No, leave it on. We need the information." David stopped her. He knew she had only been about to turn off the set out of consideration for him. David looked over at the boy laying on his couch... a scientist? He wasn't even old enough to be out of high school, let alone be a scientist, the news people had obviously gotten their facts wrong.

"We need to set that arm." David told his wife, pointing to the badly bruised and twisted limb, resting against the fur of the coat. Elly nodded her head, resigned. Neither wanted to do it, but both knew it

had to be done and soon.

Sitting on the edge of the couch again, David carefully lifted and examined the arm, causing the boy to moan softly and open his eyes. With care David gently re-laid the arm back down. Bright blue eyes focused directly onto David's own and rapidly filled with pain and confusion.

"Who are you?" the boy asked, a hint of fear in his question.

"I'm a friend, my name is David. You've had an accident and we are trying to help you." David told him trying to soothe his fears.

"We?" the boy asked, picking up on the plural.

"Yes. My wife, Elly and I" David told him, waving Elly closer for the introduction.

Elly sat on the end of the couch, near the boy's feet. She patted his leg comfortingly while she spoke.

"Hello there. You're Lucas right?" she asked and waited for his nodded confirmation, before continuing. "Well Lucas, there are a great many people, who are going to be very pleased to hear you are all right." She encouraged him and was rewarded by a soft smile.

Lucas's eyes widened as the memory of the crash returned to him. He remembered the plane falling, then hitting the ground, and he remembered his own fearful scream. "The others? On the plane, I tried to get to them but I fell and couldn't get back. Are they okay?" Lucas struggled against the comfort of the couch. He had to help the others. They were depending on him

"Whoa there boy." The old man said, pushing gently but firmly on his chest, forcing him to lay flat again. Lucas found himself too weak to resist, and dropped boneless back into the warm bed clothes.

"Son, there was nothing you could do for them. I checked them when we found you. They died in the crash." David told him.

"Did you know them?" Elly asked him hesitantly

"No." Lucas answered her sadly, shaking his head.

For a terrible moment, Lucas's imagination replaced the real passengers with images of people he did know. The Captain, Krieg, Westphalen, even the annoying professor from the conference he'd just been to, took the places of the real passengers. The vision of his friend's dead bodies strewn around the cabin, their eyes open, staring at him, took his breath away. He crunched his eyes closed to block the vision and shook his head to clear it. He felt an intense relief that he hadn't known anyone on the flight, and that all his friends were safe. Following hard on the heels of his relief came a swell of shame at the thought. The people who had died had families and people who cared about them, too. He shouldn't be feeling glad they had died. A single tear of remorse coursed its way down his cheek for the lost lives, but he was still grateful no one else from the seaQuest had been on board that plane.

"Hey now. It's okay, you're safe" Elly said, patting his leg again, misinterpreting the tear. At the meaningful look from her husband, Elly continued, "Sweetheart, you've broken your arm. It needs to be set, so that it can heal properly. Its already been left longer than it should have. I'm sorry about this, it has to be done. It is going to hurt, but we need you to stay as still as you can while we set it." She told him compassionately.

Lucas could feel his heart pounding in his chest as he listened to the old woman. He knew Elly was right, but his arm already felt as though it were on fire. His whole body ached as if he had been put through a mincer several times. He wasn't sure how much more pain he could take. He nodded his head and prepared himself as well as he could. "I understand" he said softly.

David watched the boy prepare himself for the coming ordeal. He seemed a great deal more prepared than David himself was feeling. David lifted Lucas's broken arm in his hands again, doing his best to ignore the boy's sharp intake of breath. Slowly and firmly, not wanting to hurry so that he could get it right the first time, he pulled and twisted the broken limb. The boy moaned and thrashed a little, unwittingly threatening to make things worse.

"Keep still!" David commanded him sternly.

With a soft sob, Lucas complied, tears streaming down his face and his good hand clutching frantically at the fur covering. The moment David felt the bones align themselves properly, he pushed them back into place. Lucas cried out in pain for a moment before passing out. David felt an intense wave of relief the moment unconsciousness claimed the boy. In fact, he wished the kid had passed out much sooner. Even though what he'd done had been necessary, he knew the memory of causing that much pain to a kid was going to stay with him for a very long time.

David felt Elly's gentle hand on his shoulder and looked into her tear stained face. He realized, with surprise, that he had a few tears of his own trickling down his face. "I love you." His wife whispered to him, as she leaned over to kiss the drying tear trails on his cheek. David allowed himself to be comforted by her. When she released him, he began to securely bandage the splints she had found into place, immobilizing the boy's arm. A cast would have been better, but the splints were the best they had available. David sincerely hoped it was enough.

The SeaQuest rocked as another torpedo scored a direct hit to the huge boat's side. Lucas grabbed the edge of the console in front of him as the entire ship tilted, putting the deck beneath his feet at an angle.

"We're taking on water - lots of it," Lt. Hichcock called out, fear edging her voice.

Captain Bridger rushed over to Lucas' station "Do something! Get on your computer. Stop the boat from sinking!" The Captain ordered.

Lucas was stunned. "How?" he asked, but the captain had already left.

Ben Kreig appeared at his elbow. "You're the genius. Think of something," the Lt. demanded before rushing away.

Water started filling the bridge, cascading over the workstations, and knocking crew members from their feet. The Captain was swept passed by the churning water, struggling against the foam and debris. "Lucas! Help us," he cried to the teen.

Lucas shook his head in horror as he struggled to drag himself on top of his console and out of the water. "I can't! I don't know what to do!" Lucas cried out in anguish, trying to make his friends understand he couldn't help them.

Lt. Kreig's dead face stared up at Lucas from the bottom of the water filled roomd "Some genius," he said, disgusted.

Darwin swam through the bridge, nosing the Captains body along as though it were one of his toys. The dolphin squeaked and clicked for a few moments. "Lucas not help," the vocorder on the wall translated the sounds.

Lucas was stunned. He couldn't understand how any of this could be happening, and he had no idea what his friends expected him to do about it anyway.

"You could at least try to help them," a voice from directly behind him said. Spinning around, Lucas paled as he saw the copilot and the two businessmen from the plane standing behind him. Blood streamed down the faces of the three men, dripping into the water at their feet and tinting the foam pink.

"What!" Lucas cried out trying to back away from them without loosing his perch on the console.

"But then you didn't help us ... did you?" the copilot accused the teenager.

Lucas shook his head in disbelief. These men couldn't be on the seaQuest. They had died in that plane crash. Then Lucas realized he couldn't be onboard a sinking seaQuest either... he'd been in the same crash.

"I'm dreaming," he said suddenly making sense of the whole bizarre nightmare.

"Yeah kid, that's right. You're dreaming, but we're still dead," the copilot snarled. He started to advance towards Lucas his fingers reaching for the boy. Lucas threw himself off the console away from the apparition. He backed away through the still churning water, terrified despite the knowledge that the whole thing was a dream.

Elly pressed the cool damp cloth to the boy's fevered head and spoke softly to him. Lucas tossed awkwardly on the couch beside her, moaning and twisting his head away from her touch. Elly patiently

dipped the cloth back into the basin before beginning to cool the boy's face and neck as well.

"No... No stay back!" Lucas cried out in his delirium. He tossed violently on the couch. His body rebounded from the chair's back causing his broken arm to slip from the cushions and dangle over the edge. Elly placed the broken limb back on the cushion, concern etched deeply on her face. That time they had been lucky ... if the boy's arm had hit the floor it could have moved the bones out of alignment. With his fever still rising Elly knew it would happen again. The next time the boy could do serious harm to himself. Elly steeled her resolve and turned to face her husband.

"David, he can't stay here. The couch is too small. We need to move him to a bed," Elly said gesturing toward the door at the far end of the living room. She wasn't surprised or moved by David's direct "No."

"David, you're being silly. The boy needs a bed. We have one spare. That's all there is to it," she told him crossly, knowing she was right.

David knew it too. He'd seen Lucas tossing and squirming on the couch, but it was just too hard to let go. He made a noncommittal grunt, which he knew Elly would take as an acceptance that she had won the argument.

"Good!" Elly declared. "I'll go make up the bed. You look after Lucas and bring him in when I'm done."

As David nodded in defeat, he watched Elly cross the room and open the door to their son's room. It wasn't that David didn't want to help Lucas ... he did. It was just the thought of putting another kid in the room that had belonged to his son, John, that he had a problem with. That Lucas was very near the same age John had been when he'd run away didn't help either. Even after all these years, David still wasn't sure why John had left. Both he and Elly had known their son had problems but neither had guessed how serious John had considered them. Then one night there had been a terrible fight, ending when John had stormed out. Elly and David had searched for John for years, and for years after that they had hoped and prayed that one day he would just walk back through the door. He never had. Neither believed it would happen anymore but still his room remained ... waiting for him.

Elly reappeared at the doorway and nodded to him. With as much care as he could, David slid his hands under the fevered boy and lifted him. Lucas struggled in his arms for a second before clutching at his shirt with a tight grip. David carried the boy into the freshly made room and laid him on the cool sheets, gently disengaging the hand. He stepped back and let Elly fuss over the sick boy. While he tried to reconcile himself with what he'd known for years. John was gone forever, and even if by some miracle he did come back, he wouldn't be needing this room again.

Captain Nathan Bridger leaned back in his chair and closed his painfully sore eyes. Westphalen had been nagging at him to get some sleep, and although he had tried, he hadn't been able to. Ever since

Lucas had been reported missing he'd been running on pure fear driven adrenaline but that level of intensity was hard to maintain. Each day the search effort had continued without result, Nathan and the rescuers had lost a little more hope of finding any survivors. He knew the other searchers were talking about scaling back the search. Even though he realized there was almost no possibility that Lucas was still alive, Nathan was reluctant to give up the search. The thought of Lucas out there ... somewhere ... frozen in the snow was more than he could stand.

The not knowing what had happened was tearing him up as much as it had when his own son, Robert, had gone missing. Nathan had to know. Had Lucas died suddenly in the crash or had he survived it only to slowly fall into a permanent sleep from the cold? Had the kid died alone or had someone been there to hold his hand till it was over? Nathan had so many similar questions about Robert. He couldn't stand any more questions, he needed them answered for Lucas.

He opened his eyes as he heard someone enter the room. One look at the search co-ordinator's face and he knew the decision had been made to end the rescue phase of the search. Nathan closed his eyes again and allowed several hot tears to escape. Just when he thought it might be possible to start again ... to build a life he would be happy in, he'd done it again. He'd lost another son.

Lucas opened his eyes, and for a long time his brain was unable to process what he saw. Eventually he realized what he was seeing was real, and not a fever induced dream about time travel. He found himself on a comfortable bed in a room that could only have been decorated by a pop music history buff, if the dated posters covering the walls were anything to go by. He felt terrible. He couldn't ever remember a time when he felt so tired. Looking around the room, he was surprised to find an old man asleep in a large chair by his bed. It took Lucas a little time to recall that the old man's name was David.

"Excuse me sir?" Lucas asked, his throat raw, and his voice barely above a whisper. The effort almost completely exhausting him.

David shifted uncomfortably in his chair and opened his eyes. He wondered what had woken him, until he noticed his patient was conscious. "Well good morning. We were beginning to wonder when you were going to wake up," David said, pleased the kid was finally awake.

"Water," Lucas managed to croak out, unable to say anything else. David held a glass of water to Lucas' lips and let him take a small drink.

"Thank you," Lucas said gratefully when he was finished drinking. Hating the vulnerable feeling laying on the bed gave him, he tried to sit up a little.

"Where do you think you're going? Just rest for a bit you've had a rough few days," David said, quickly put a restraining hand on the teenager's chest. The gentle pressure he applied was enough to completely overpower Lucas, who slumped back into the bed.

"How long was I asleep?" Lucas asked. He knew it had been a long time but he had no idea how long.

"You've been in and out for almost 5 days. You were pretty sick there for a while but you're definitely on the mend," David told him.

Lucas was amazed. "Why didn't you take me to a hospital?" Lucas asked uncertain. He was fairly sure these people meant him no harm, so he was confused by their seeming negligence.

"Ahh... I'm afraid we can't just yet. You see, we're snowed in at the moment. We tried to get some help for you, but the phone isn't working. Elly thinks maybe the storm knocked out the aerial. I don't know ... the damn thing has never worked right," David said disgustedly.

"Maybe I could take a look at it later..." Lucas mumbled an offer, his eyes already closing in sleep.

David shook his head ruefully at the sleeping boy, an amused smile on his face.

"What's so funny?" Elly asked from the door.

"The kid says he's going to fix our vid phone for us," David said with a chuckle.

Elly looked down seriously at the young face resting on the pillow. "I wouldn't be surprised if he did," she stated, earning herself a questioning look from her husband. "They have been talking about him a lot on the news today. He really is a scientist as well as the chief computer analyst onboard the seaQuest so he must be good with electronics," she informed David.

"Huh? ... still kind of young to be on a submarine though," David said amazed.

"David, there's more. They are calling off the search. They aren't looking for him anymore... I think we should let him try. His parents must be sick with worry." Elly finished.

David nodded "All right. If he thinks he can do it, we'll let him try ... when he's stronger. It's already broken, he can't do it any harm," David agreed.

A few days later, Lucas's strength had returned to the point where he was becoming seriously bored staying in bed. He finally convinced Elly to let him leave his room and sit in the main room for a while. She had grudgingly agreed on the condition that he was to take special care not to re-injure his arm.

Being allowed out of bed wasn't the relief from boredom that Lucas was hoping it would be. He'd only been up for a few hours and was all ready feeling the time drag by. David was outside clearing away some of the snow, and Elly was humming to herself in the small kitchen as she prepared dinner. Lucas didn't want to interrupt either of them just because he was bored. Looking for something to do he turned on

the vid. What he saw on the screen had him instantly transfixed. His breath caught in his throat as he realized what he was seeing.

Elly, hearing a strangled gasp coming from the main room, quickly put down the mixing bowl she carried and rushed from the kitchen to check on Lucas. Her first thought was relief when she saw the boy standing motionless in the middle of the room, he hadn't hurt himself as he'd feared. Then she noticed the tears streaming from his eyes as he watched the new broadcast. The vid screen showed a very somber setting, a large hall filled with people ... many of them in UEO dress uniforms, listening to an older man speak. The older man also wore a UEO uniform, he carried himself with an unconscious air of command, that was spoiled only by the downward slump of his shoulders. Elly knew she was seeing a funeral ... Lucas' funeral. She moved behind the boy wrapping her arms around him, and pulling him back so that his body leant against hers.

"That's the captain ... they think I'm dead," Lucas said softly

"I know sweetheart ... but you're not," she told him comfortingly

She was glad they couldn't hear the Captain's words, the news reader obviously feeling her words to be superior, had drowned then out. Just the vision of Lucas's friends at his funeral was causing the boy a lot of pain. Elly held Lucas until the news item finished, then she turn him toward her and held him close while he cried.

"It's okay, your family will know you're all right soon," she tried to comfort him, and was confused when Lucas began to cry harder.

"The news reporter said they weren't there," Lucas told her in a quiet voice when he had regained some control. Elly lead him back to his room and settled him into the bed. She sat on the bed next to him, holding him close and letting him talk. Lucas talked about everything from his feeling of betrayal and abandonment by his family to the more pleasant feelings he had about his life on board the seaQuest. Elly offered a few opinions and asked several questions, but made no attempt to stop the flow of words. At last Lucas was spent and his words trailed off. Elly held him until he slept.

Leaving the room she was surprised to see David sitting on the couch, she hadn't realized that much time had passed.

"He all right?" David asked concerned.

"Yeah ... but I don't know how."

At David's questioning glance Elly recounted much of what Lucas had just told her. It amazed her that a child so deprived of parental guidance had turned out as considerate as this one had.

"He's wrong, you know? ... He does have a family. I saw the funeral too, they must have repeated it," David said, indicating the vid unit. "That Captain looked pretty broken up about it," he added.

"Yes, but it's not the same thing," Elly insisted sadly.

Lucas began to recover at a remarkable rate over the next few days. Well enough that David agreed to let him work on the vid phone. Lucas had been hard at it for several hours, but was finding the job difficult due to his broken arm. Watching the boy struggle to free a piece of circuitry, David decided to, literally, lend him a hand. At first Lucas was surprised the older man had wanted to help but he was grateful for it at the same time. As time passed the pair found they enjoyed working together. Although David was still uncomfortable with the technology, he recognized that Lucas obviously knew what he was doing.

"We're nearly done ... here connect this to that green connector over there," Lucas instructed David, handing him a thin optic cable.

"This one? The one on the left?" David clarified.

"Yes."

"Over here... beside the blue one?"

"Yep, that's it."

"It barely reaches, you sure I have the right one?" David asked, a little unsure.

"Mmmm positive," Lucas confirmed

David connected the cable.

"No. No ... Not THAT one!" Lucas exclaimed loudly then broke into laughter as he watched David leap back from the panel as if it had bitten him.

"I ... I'm sorry. I just couldn't resist," Lucas apologized through his laughter.

"That wasn't funny," David complained.

Lucas laughed harder and after a moment David grudgingly joined him. Elly smiled at the pair from the kitchen doorway. The boy had a nice laugh, and it was good to hear David laughing like that ... he didn't do it nearly enough, she thought.

Captain to the bridge ... immediately!" Commander Ford's voice came over Nathan's PAL. He rolled off his bunk to answer the call ... he hadn't been sleeping anyway.

"What is it, commander?" Nathan asked, getting his robe on, but not wanting to go to the bridge unless it was absolutely necessary.

"Captain .. it's ... Ugh, you'd better come see for yourself," Ford uncharacteristically stumbled out a vague reply.

Nathan entered the bridge, momentarily annoyed that Ford didn't seem to recognize his presence. The entire bridge crew stood staring at the main viewer. Nathan looked there too, then sat heavily in his chair ... stunned.

"Lucas?" he managed to mutter, disbelieving his eyes.

"Hi Captain, it's me," Lucas said with a grin splitting his face. "I want you to meet two friends of mine. This is Elly and David. They saved my life," Lucas continued, indicating the old couple standing behind him.

"I'm pleased ... very pleased to meet you," Nathan said, his shocked feeling beginning to be swamped with joy.

Epilogue

Captain Bridger craned his head around the entrance to the moon pool, smiling when he spotted his quarry. Lucas sat on the narrow bridge spanning the pool, his bare feet dangling in the water and dressed in his bright multicolored night coat. Nathan watched as Darwin glided under the bridge. The dolphin aimed itself so that the boy's feet would stroke the length of it back as it swam passed.

"Hey Darwin," Lucas greeted his non-human friend distractedly.

Nathan listened to the Darwin's whistled reply, waiting a beat for the English translation, but the vocorder remained silent. Lucas must not have turned it on.

Juggling the two cups of hot chocolate in one hand and a small plate of sweet snacks in the other, he made his way onto the bridge. Nathan made sure his approach was loud enough to give Lucas plenty of warning that he was coming. The last thing Nathan wanted to do was spook the kid and put him on the defensive. He put the snack plate down and held one of the steaming cups under Lucas' nose until the boy took it from him.

"Up kind of late aren't you?" the Captain asked, sitting down cross-legged next to the teenager. From Lucas' reaction, Nathan knew that hadn't been the right approach to take.

"You don't have to check up on me all the time ... I'm not going to break you know! I wish everyone wouldn't treat me like an invalid all the time," Lucas snapped.

"Hey. Take it easy. Do I look like Westphalen?" the captain joked quietly, trying to tickle the boy's humor. He knew Kristen had been a little over protective since Lucas had gotten back ... She had admitted that much to Nathan but she hadn't been able help herself. She had taken the news that Lucas was presumed dead very hard.

"Nah, Westphalen's got better legs" Lucas said nodding his head toward the Captain's bony knees.

The kid has that right, Nathan thought to himself, images of Kristen's shapely legs flashing into his mind. He sighed softly and glanced over at Lucas, just in time to catch the fading edge of a knowing smile on the boy's face. Nathan realized, good humored that he'd been set up, but chose to ignore it.

Lucas absently reached down and selected a snack. Nathan smiled, Lucas wasn't the only one on this bridge that could play manipulation games. Nathan had known that Lucas was upset, he had been since he'd gotten over the initial excitement surrounding his return to the boat. When Lucas was upset he never even thought to eat. Every snack on the plate was a known favorite of the teenagers.

"So .. I never got around to asking you ... How was the conference?" Nathan asked, looking for a safe topic to get Lucas talking.

Lucas stared into his nearly empty cup, as if looking for the answer. "It was good... I think. Confusing," he said at last.

"Oh yeah? How so?" Nathan asked interested. Lucas related the problems he'd had at the conference, especially understanding the reactions of the other attendees. Nathan let him talk until he was finished, and thought for a moment himself before offering an opinion.

"You know Lucas, sometimes people aren't just interested in results." The captain told his young charge. At Lucas' skeptical look, he sighed and amended his statement. "Okay. The people that pay for it are only ever interested in the final result. But sometimes, when the only interest you have in something is purely professional ... You're less concerned by what someone has found and more interested in how they found it," the captain said. Nathan watched Lucas nodding, but there was still confusion in his eyes.

Nathan rested his hand lightly on Lucas's shoulder. "I've watched you with Westphalen you know.." the captain said, smiling slightly at the brief flash of annoyance the doctor's name brought to the young face. "You question her continuously and sometimes insistently. Is that any different to what happened to you at the conference?" the Captain asked

"I guess not." Lucas thought about it for a moment before he agreed grudgingly.

They sat on the bridge in companionable silence for a while, watching Darwin play in the pool beneath them.

"I miss them you know," Lucas stated quietly.

Nathan knew the boy was referring to David and Elly, not the conference professors. "You don't have to. I had Lt. Kreig organize a replacement for their vid phone. You know its only about 10 am there. You could call," Nathan informed the boy.

Lucas's face lit up with joy. "You did! Thanks, Captain!" Lucas said with a grin on his face and in his voice. The Captain shook his head as he watched the boy grab a quick hand full of snacks and charge out of the room to make his call.

Finita.

End
file.